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## **Memoirs of Louis Goldstein**

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**PII Redacted**



## Memoirs of Louis Goldstein

I was born on April 6, 1914 in Subcarpathia, in a small village called Izvor. At that time, Izvor was part of Austria-Hungary. After World War I, in October 1918, Izvor became part of Czechoslovakia. Years later, from March 1939 until 1944, Izvor and the surrounding Carpathian mountains were occupied by Hungary. After World War II, this area became part of the Soviet Union. Finally, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, this section of the country became the Ukraine.

I was the youngest of 14 children, so they sometimes called me "Louis the 14<sup>th</sup>." My family members were the only Jews living in Izvor. When I was born, my three oldest brothers were already living in America. I attended elementary school in the Izvor area, from 1920 to 1924, taught in the Russian language. I went to junior high school in the nearby town of Svalava from 1924 to 1928, taught in Russian. I attended a commercial high school from 1928 to 1933 in Munkacs (now called Mukačevo,) where I learned to speak Hungarian. I had also learned to speak Czech by this time, since Carpathia had become part of Czechoslovakia. I commuted by train from Svalava to Munkacs. I took a one year course there in Latin and philosophy, and also received training to become a teacher. Afterward, I taught elementary school in a one room schoolhouse in the Izvor area. The school had several grade levels in one class.

From 1936 to 1938, I was able to attend law school at Charles University in Prague. However, these studies were interrupted by the German occupation of Czechoslovakia. At the same time, the Carpathian Mountains were occupied by Hungary. All of Czechoslovakia was falling apart and the German anti-Jewish laws started to take effect. As a Jew, I could not continue in law school and could not continue to be a teacher. I had to return to Svalava and, with the financial help of my brother, I was able to open a European-style candy store. Even this was eventually taken away from me by the Hungarians. Between 1941 and 1942, I worked as a bookkeeper in a lumber company in Irsáva.

Starting in 1939, all young Jewish men were forced to work in Hungarian slave labor camps for several consecutive months each year. In 1939, I was in a camp for a few weeks in Munkacs. In 1940, I spent a few months in a camp in the Bačka region of Yugoslavia. In 1941, I worked for a few months in a lumber camp in Csernholova.

It was during these years that I became very friendly with Magda Blaufeld, and, despite all our hardships, we were married on March 29, 1942. In September of the same year, I had to report to a slave labor camp in Kisvárda. From there we were transferred to the Russian front in the area of Osztrogosz and Voronezh. In December 1942, we were captured by the Russians and became prisoners of war. At this point, I completely lost contact with my wife and family. I had absolutely no knowledge about them and did not hear of them until the end of the war.



In Osztrogoszk, the central gathering point of all the POWs, there were approximately 15,000 men. There were Germans, Italians, Romanians, and several thousand Jewish men, dressed in civilian clothes with the mandatory yellow arm bands. Surprisingly, there were some Jewish officers among the Russian personnel who greeted us. One of them said, "Achenu Kol Yisrael."

From Osztrogoszk, we were forced to walk for three days to the nearest railroad station. During our three day march, we had many casualties. Many who could not walk were shot by the Russian guards. Many were left behind and froze to death, this being the coldest winter of the century. Unfortunately, my brother David was one of these casualties. From the train station, we were transported in cattle cars to a POW camp in Morshansk. During our torturous train ride, because of lack of food and water, many more people died until we reached our destination.

We arrived in Morshansk on January 20, 1943. Needless to say, circumstances were very difficult there. Originally a summer training camp for the Russian army, the camp had about 100 to 125 bunkers covered only with twigs. There was no heat and no light. In each bunker, there were approximately 100 prisoners. The crowded conditions in these places became so unbearable, that several men were killed by their fellow prisoners.

In February of 1943, a tremendous typhoid epidemic started, and by April of the same year only about 500 prisoners remained alive. The majority of men were hospitalized at this point. There were about 200 men working to rebuild the camp. I was also hospitalized, with frostbite, and my toes had to be amputated. Medical facilities were very primitive and most of us suffered a great deal during this time.

After recuperating from my injuries, I managed to work for a few months for a Russian Jewish officer, serving as his interpreter, and earned a little extra food for the effort. My knowledge of languages my have helped save my life. In the meantime, the Russian army started to advance toward Poland. In the spring of 1944, several prisoners, citizens of Czechoslovakia, were allowed to join the Czechoslovak Legion, under the direction of General Svoboda. Despite many difficulties, I also managed to join this outfit, the so-called Zahraniční Armada.

After fighting the Germans from Poland to Slovakia to Moravia to Bohemia, the Legion finally reached Prague on May 5, 1945. We marched in front of President Beneš on May 9, 1945. The war was over at this point. In Prague, I had the first opportunity to meet liberated prisoners of the concentration camps. They were the ones to inform me of the cruel fate of the Jewish population of Hungary and Subcarpathia. One of these refugees was my nephew, Nandor, who confirmed all the tragic news about our family. We lost sisters, brothers, nieces, and nephews - too many to count.

But I still did not know anything about my wife, Magda. We had lost contact after I left for the slave labor camp in 1942. Finally, one day in early May, a



soldier from my unit told me he had seen my wife arriving in Prague. The following day, I went to the refugee center where our emotional reunion took place. Our happiness was indescribable. We were able to stay in Prague until 1946, when we immigrated to the United States.

Our family had been decimated and the surviving young people followed us to the United States. We lived in New York, in Brooklyn, until 1948. We moved to Detroit and stayed there until 1960. Then we moved back to New York and lived in Great Neck thereafter. We have two wonderful daughters, Susan, born January 21, 1948 in New York, and Julie, born December 7, 1952 in Detroit.

